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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

30 May 1962

Refer to: 1-6560/62

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: Dr. Birrenbach, CDU Member of Bundestag and Foreign Policy Committee, and Paul H. Nitze

Date - Place: 30 May 1962 - Mr. Nitze's office

Dr. Birrenbach said that there had been a meeting in Bonn of CDU leaders with Adenauer on the subject of British adherence to the Common Market. At that meeting considerable progress was made in straightening out some of the policy issues on economic matters. One major point, however, remained unresolved, which he wished to discuss with me. This was the question of the European Community's relationship to the nuclear problem after British adherence. He referred to two recent articles by Raymond Aron in Figaro which the Germans take seriously as representing an inspired statement of the French position. What was interesting to them in these articles was that Aron placed greater emphasis upon equality with the UK in nuclear matters than upon the requirement for an independent nuclear deterrent.

Birrenbach said that he and the other CDU people were wholly persuaded that a small nuclear force had little defense utility and that Europe must strive for the closest continuing relationship with the United States for its defense. However, there were psychological problems in Europe which required a degree of European co-determination with the United States on the use of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe. I asked Birrenbach what he meant by co-determination. Birrenbach said that what he meant thereby was a two key system. In other words, that there should be two fingers on the safety catch with respect to European based weapons, both a European finger and a U.S. finger. He said they were all agreed that the U.S. should not be placed in a position where a European nuclear force could trigger the U.S. into a war against its will. He asked me whether in principle I thought such an arrangement would be acceptable to the United States. I replied that I personally did not think this principle would

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cause the U.S. difficulty. I thought the problem was rather that of whether such a system would be acceptable to the French. Birrenbach said he thought the British would be prepared at the last moment to commit their nuclear force to a European Community, if that was necessary to close the deal. Birrenbach said that they recognized that there would be a problem with de Gaulle but that they did not believe there would be a problem with other Frenchmen. He thought such an arrangement would be acceptable to Pinay, Maurice Faure, Guy Mollet and in fact all French political figures other than de Gaulle.

Birrenbach went on to say that Adenauer had aged a great deal, that Adenauer himself was thinking of staying in office no longer than one year, that he considered the development of French-German cooperation the major achievement of his career, and that he did not propose to do anything in the last months of his tenure of office which could weaken or undermine the Franco-German relationship. Adenauer, therefore, could not be counted upon to bring much pressure directly upon de Gaulle. He, Birrenbach, had however proposed to Adenauer that de Gaulle could be isolated both within the Six and within France if some reasonable alternative to de Gaulle's nuclear position could be put forward. Adenauer had shrugged his shoulders and said "What will the Americans think of such a proposition?" Birrenbach had replied let me go to Washington and talk to people in the State Department and to Paul Nitze in the Defense Department, and if possible see Mr. McNamara, and find out. Adenauer had said go ahead and do it. This was the reason for his, Birrenbach's, visit.

I asked Birrenbach to be more precise as to exactly what it was he had in mind. Birrenbach said that he had in mind the creation of a European Defense Community along the lines of the 1951 project, in other words a supranational commission, with a president, similar to the other community organs. He had in mind that both the French and the British would transfer to that body all their nuclear capabilities. This would mean that the British reactors and laboratories would have to be transferred to the Defense Community as well as the French installations at Marcoule. I asked him how he conceived of the warheads resulting from this production being controlled. He said that he imagined this would be done in the same way in which the U.S. controls its own warheads. He went on to say that he understood that technical devices might be possible under which dual control could be inserted in the weapons at an early stage. He went on to suggest that the President of the Defense Community would in effect become a Defense Minister for the European part of NATO.

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I asked him how he conceived of political decisions being arrived at within the Defense Community. Would this problem not be even more difficult than within NATO as a whole? He made the following points:

First, that the 7 or perhaps 9 nations, members of the Community, would be collaborating in the economic and political fields and should, therefore, have an easier time of getting together in the defense field than NATO as a whole. Secondly, that the Defense Community could probably not be organized for 5 years or so. Thirdly, that the question was basically psychological. The European knew perfectly well that they could not use a small nuclear force independently of the United States, but that for reasons of prestige it was important for them to have a theoretical possibility of a separate role.

Birrenbach said he thought the concept of NATO as a 4th nuclear power was dead. He did not think anybody could be persuaded that the problem of 15 fingers on the trigger could be solved. I said that it was not clear to me that it would be easier to solve the problem of 7 or 9 fingers on the trigger in the European Community and then the relations of the European Defense Community to the U.S. than to solve the problems inherent in a NATO multilateral force.

I asked Birrenbach whether he thought the French really would be prepared to accept a dual control system with respect to weapons on their territory. Birrenbach replied that he thought it might be necessary to have a provision that in the event of a crisis it could be agreed to separate the dual control system into a single control system. In other words, the European Defense Community should perhaps have at least a possibility of going it alone. I said that in that event we certainly would want to be assured of sufficient time and opportunity to totally disassociate ourselves from the European action. Birrenbach said he thought the contingency would never arise, but that this might be necessary for psychological reasons. I said we in the U.S. had to look at the substance of these matters most seriously and that there might be a psychological problem for us, too. Birrenbach replied that they were quite aware that the U.S. was the defender of the Alliance and must and did take a more responsible view toward these nuclear matters than did the others. He said he further recognized that the U.S. was much more serious about standing up to the Russians to the point of nuclear war than any other member of the Alliance.

Birrenbach then turned to the question of the negotiations about Berlin. He said that there were two theories in Germany as to whether the relations between the U.S. and Germany has basically changed. One

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theory was that the United States with its global responsibilities and its interest in disarmament and the reduction of tensions with the USSR was determined to go ahead with negotiations regardless of the views of the Germans. The other theory was that the recent difficulties were more incidental than fundamental. I replied that the first theory was completely wrong. There had been no change in U.S. policy with respect to Berlin negotiations since last fall. The various issues had been discussed first in the Ambassadorial and related groups and then with Schroeder and Adenauer in Washington. We had thought that agreement had been reached on all the important issues. The Germans had been kept fully informed of all conversations with the Russians. The April paper was very little changed and was in my opinion an improvement from the German standpoint over the paper which had been discussed with Schroeder in Geneva. I said we had been surprised at the violence of the Chancellor's reaction to the April paper, and secondly we had been disturbed by the indiscretion which had resulted in a press discussion which I believed had been harmful to the interests of Berlin, Germany and the Alliance as a whole. Birrenbach* said he was glad I had put the press indiscretion second rather than first. He asked me whether the voting procedure in the Access Authority Agreement had been agreed last fall. I said my recollection was that the Germans had reserved on this point but that no other formula had been suggested. Birrenbach then discussed the German counter-proposal of US-USSR and Switzerland. I did not comment.

Birrenbach then turned to the point about non-diffusion. He said Germany was perfectly prepared to give the U.S. any assurance it desired with respect to ABC weapons, but that to agree on a matter in a treaty with the Russians was too high a price to pay. In the subsequent discussion it was clear that Birrenbach and his associates do not think there is a substantial risk that the Soviet Union will sign the peace treaty and follow up with action against our interests in Berlin. I said I took a more serious view of the risks. We agreed that the concessions one might contemplate making in order to arrive at an agreement or modus vivendi with respect to Berlin were directly related to the risks one foresaw if no agreement were achieved. Birrenbach said that, after the construction of the wall, he thought the risks were low.

(Signed) Paul H. Nitze

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